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**Sent:** 10/7/2011 3:16:49 PM  
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**Subject:** NEWS UPDATES: House GOP, EPA spar over risk assessments (E&E Daily)

**Attachments:** DIB0001

## House GOP, EPA spar over risk assessments

Jeremy P. Jacobs, E&E reporter

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House Republicans yesterday questioned U.S. EPA's scientific system for determining the health hazards posed by chemicals and argued that it is costing the country jobs.

Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy questioned whether EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) -- which provides the scientific foundation of EPA regulations -- was overly cautious in determining the level at which a chemical poses a health risk.

That mindset, they argued, can lead to unnecessarily strict regulations that are difficult for industry to meet.

"An overabundance of caution in the risk assessments and an overabundance of caution from policymakers could create job loss and the movement of jobs overseas," subcommittee Chairman John Shimkus (R-Ill.) said at a hearing yesterday.

The Obama administration pushed back strongly against the charges, saying the program provides information that encourages innovation and increases competition in the marketplace.

But Rep. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) charged that EPA's use of science bordered on "advocacy."

"The concern," he said, is that the agency "is manipulating the process and science to achieve advocacy."

Cassidy also accused EPA of ignoring scientific studies in its hazard assessments.

"Why in the world are we making a decision that affects a ton of jobs on something that has another plausible alternative explanation?" he said.

Much of the hearing focused on an National Academy of Sciences (NAS) review in April of IRIS's draft formaldehyde assessment. The NAS panel found significant problems with IRIS's scientific methodologies and recommended EPA make changes to the IRIS protocols (*Greenwire*, April 8).

Republicans and industry have said the NAS report illustrated significant flaws in the IRIS program. The American Chemistry Council (ACC) has since called for all controversial IRIS assessments to be submitted for an NAS review, and House Republicans sought a similar objective in an appropriations bill earlier this year.

Environmentalists and EPA have noted that the NAS panel did not call for halting the formaldehyde assessment or others.

EPA's Assistant Administrator for the Office of Research and Development Paul Anastas offered a full-throated defense of the IRIS program.

He said EPA is currently in the process of implementing all the recommendations from the NAS report.

Anastas also sought to respond to the economic criticism from the panel. In particular, he emphasized that IRIS assessments are not regulations.

"What an IRIS assessment is doing is looking at the hazard characterization and the dose response," he said. That "has to be combined with exposure models."

The latter part of that process, he said, is done in the regulatory process -- and IRIS is not part of that.

Anastas also argued that the data IRIS provides is beneficial to the economy because it provides industry with important scientific values when developing products.

"We believe this information empowers innovation in the marketplace," Anastas said.

He also emphasized that companies are shifting to green chemistry, which uses substances that pose no toxic risk to humans or the environment. That is also helping the economy, he said.

"Companies across the country are raking in profits and enhancing competitiveness through green chemistry," he said.

Anastas received some support from Democrats on the panel. Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) asked Anastas and other witnesses what impact halting IRIS would have.

"It would not serve us well," said Thomas Burke of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

David Trimble of the Government Accountability Office said the regulatory process would come to a "screeching halt" if IRIS assessments are not finalized.

Trimble also said GAO is currently researching how well EPA is implementing the recommendations of the NAS formaldehyde report. GAO, he said, plans to issue a report on the topic later this year.

Other witnesses offered harsh criticism of IRIS.

Michael Honeycutt of the Texas Council on Environmental Quality said IRIS has become overly "precautionary." That, he said, has led his organization to develop its own method for chemical assessments.

He added that "EPA's new assessments may unnecessarily scare the public" and "distract" attention from real public health concerns that deserve attention.

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